



Newsletter of the African Burial Ground & Five Points Archaeological Projects

# UPDATE

Fall 1999

Vol. 2 No. 12

*Update*, the newsletter of the African Burial Ground and Five Points Archaeological Projects, is published by the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), at 6 World Trade Ctr., U.S. Custom House, Rm. 239, New York, NY 10048. Tel. (212) 432-5707, Fax (212) 432-5920. Please send all e-mail inquiries to [nyabg@worldnet.att.net](mailto:nyabg@worldnet.att.net).

*Update* provides current information about New York City's African Burial Ground and its historical context. This publication is made possible with funds provided by the U.S. General Services Administration under contract number 2PCB-CM-97-0154.

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## In This Issue...

1999 Writing Competition Winners:  
High School Stories and Middle  
School Poetry.....3  
Media Representations of N.Y.'s  
18th Century African Population.....9  
The Middle Passage Revisited.....12  
*and more!*

## The New York African Burial Ground: Site of the Century

Dear *Update* Readers,

Since its rediscovery and excavation in 1991, the African Burial Ground has served as a beacon, a reminder of the painful and often denied history of the enslavement of African men, women and children in New York City. The ancestral remains which have been studied at Howard University offer a rare glimpse into the lives of those forgotten builders of early New York. More than 100,000 individuals have received public information. More than 500 newspaper and magazine articles have been written about this historic and sacred site. Five documentary films have been produced. More than 150,000 people globally have signed petitions for issuance of an African Burial Ground commemorative postage stamp. This fall, *American Archaeology* magazine in "celebrating ground breaking excavations in the United States" recognized the African Burial Ground as one of the sites of the 20th century.

The anticipated reburial in late 2000 will mark a long awaited closing for those spirits disturbed by the 1991-92 excavation, and for their advocates and descendants who have maintained a vigilant watch for their preservation and respectful treatment. The reburial in the new millennium will also mark a new beginning with a permanent memorial and recognition for the lives and contributions of those African ancestors upon whose shoulders we stand. I continue to believe and trust that in the new millennium and beyond that **truly we will be guided by the ancestors....**

*Sherrill D. Wilson*  
Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.  
Editor-In-Chief

**"There isn't any African American or African culture lost...The tangible evidence of their lives resides in their death, so their bones are representations of their lives."  
Maya Angelou, (1993). *The African Burial Ground: An American Discovery***

## >>> LETTERS TO THE EDITOR >>>

### The Richard Brown Award

Dear Dr. Wilson & OPEI Staff,

Thank you so much for your thoughtful consideration of me in the form of the OPEI Richard Brown Award. It was a wonderful surprise!!

Peace, Love, & Blessings Always,  
Deborah (Akua) Wright  
Charleston, SC

[Ed. note: The Richard Brown award was created to pay tribute to Richard Brown, former member of the Federal Steering Committee. Mr. Brown spearheaded the African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp Petition Drive and single handedly collected more than 10,000 signatures. Deborah Wright has made innumerable contributions to the stamp petition campaign and the entire project as our former Field Office Administrator. We wish her well in all her endeavors].

Thanks for the Richard Brown Award. When I think of what our ancestors endured for me to realize that "I Am Somebody," I am unworthy (to receive an award)! I love, bless and appreciate all for the hard work in getting signatures for the stamp.

Sadye M. Pierce  
Philadelphia, PA

I just wanted to thank you and your staff for the great surprise. I was unable to attend the Richard Brown ceremony because I was away. But, I was very happy to receive that thoughtful certificate. Thank you so much!

Ms. Maureen Forrest  
North Baldwin, NY

### The Stamp Petition Drive Continues

"The wise person who does not learn ceases to be wise" (Afrikan proverb). As prisoners in a medium security facility, we have committed criminal acts. However, this does not mean we no longer adhere to our Afrikan responsibility in the struggle. Therefore, please find enclosed a petition for the African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp Drive, signed by prisoners here at Haynesville Correctional Center. We apologize for the disgrace we have caused the Afrikan family due to our criminal behavior. Nevertheless, it took this same prison experience for our great Afrikan leader Malcolm X, to realize his righteous mission. Therefore, do not count us out. We are very grateful for the opportunity to assist OPEI in their efforts to bring recognition to our ancestors. "Asante Sana" which means thank you very much in Kiswahili...

Barry Coleman  
Haynesville, VA

[Ed. Note: OPEI is thankful for the petitions and comments. Please see Update Page 11 for further details.]

## AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

### YEAR 2000 POETRY, SHORT STORY & ESSAY COMPETITION



## GUIDELINES

- ★ THIS COMPETITION IS OPEN TO STUDENTS IN ELEMENTARY, JUNIOR HIGH, HIGH SCHOOL AND COLLEGE
- ★ ONE WINNER AND ONE RUNNER UP WILL BE CHOSEN FROM EACH OF THE ABOVE CATEGORIES
- ★ WINNING ENTRIES WILL BE PUBLISHED IN *UPDATE*: THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND PROJECT
- ★ THIS COMPETITION IS FOR POETRY, SHORT STORY AND ESSAYS ON THE SUBJECT OF THE N.Y. AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND OR THE EARLY NEW YORK AFRICAN PRESENCE. SHORT STORY AND ESSAY ENTRIES SHOULD BE 1200 WORDS OR LESS. POETRY ENTRIES SHOULD BE 150 WORDS OR LESS.
- ★ EVALUATION OF SUBMISSIONS WILL BE BASED ON THEME, CLARITY AND ORIGINALITY.
- ★ ALL ENTRIES MUST BE RECEIVED BY JANUARY 30, 2000 ALONG WITH AN OFFICIAL ENTRY FORM.

FOR ENTRY FORM AND INFORMATION PACKAGE

PLEASE CALL:

(212) 432-5707

# 1999 African Burial Ground Writing Competition Winners: Short Stories - High School Category

## Second Place Winner High School Category

### African Burial Ground: The Fifth Point

by James Carter

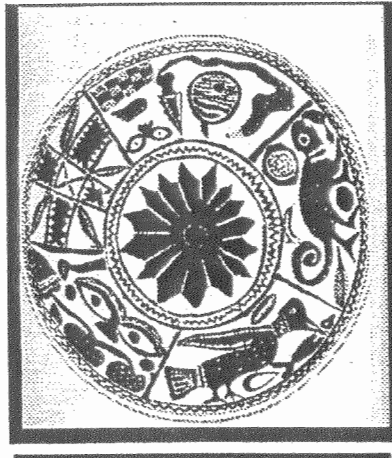
On a rainy Tuesday evening I was studying for a history exam. After drinking a tall cup of coffee I dozed off into a deep sleep...

Strangely enough I was in a desert with a lot of dark-skinned men and women around me with little or no clothes on. As I gazed down at my feet, I realized that I didn't have any clothes on, with the exception of a leaf that covered my genital area. To my surprise, I found myself in Africa along the Ivory Coast. I approached a tall, dark, muscular male when suddenly I felt a lashing pain across my back. I then woke up and to my surprise my back was covered in blood. My brief nightmare quickly turned into a reminder of how my African ancestors were brought to the New World during the Atlantic Slave Trade.

As a result of the slave trade, Africans were forced to perform almost physically impossible tasks such as building houses and harvesting fields while working in sweltering heat and unsanitary conditions. These hardships and others of equal punishment would be inflicted upon my ancestors for centuries to come. The pain that they went through was both unthinkable and unimaginable. The separation from both the nuclear and extended family tested the

spirit of the Africans. The fact that I am alive today is a symbol of the fact that my ancestors survived death.

Deep within me was a tearing pain that guided me to who knows where. I got out of my bed and quickly got dressed. I ran outside hoping that the air alone would calm my soul.



Before I knew it I found myself in downtown Manhattan. Deep within my soul I heard a voice calling me, telling me to walk in a certain direction. As I walked I spotted an old man whose skin was as dark as the coals of the Earth and whose eyes were as deep as the ocean abyss. I was drawn to him by curiosity. Scared, yet compelled by the appearance of this old man, I proceeded toward him. Our eyes made contact. I could not turn my eyes away because within his eyes was the story of all stories.

I sat down next to him and wondered just what to say next. No

words were ever exchanged, yet I learned so much. At the end of his story he reached down to Mother Earth and out of her essence he placed in my hands a small amount of soil. Within this soil was a bone, but not just any bone.

Once again I was curious to find out just what kind of bone it was. I went to the museum where my aunt worked to find out just what exactly I had in my possession. She looked at the bone with a strange face and asked me where I had found it. I told her that I found it in lower Manhattan near Chambers Street. After an investigation was done, it was discovered that where I had been given the bone was an African burial site.

The area where the grave was located was near the area called Five Points. This area was once known as a violent, dangerous and impoverished section of Manhattan in the middle 1800's. Near Five Points! This was a perfect place for my ancestors to be buried. My ancestors, who built this country, my ancestors who built the train tracks and harvested the food to feed the white bellies were buried next to a place called Five Points.

Through spirituality, forgiveness, family and the will to survive, was the fifth point, which I call life. I am alive today and I symbolize the apex, the fifth point of the foundation that my ancestors created.

◆\*◆



Helen Galindo  
Photo credit: Galindo Family

### Third Place Winner High School Category

#### "An Educational Experience"

by Helen Galindo

On one hot and sunny day three kids were sitting around just playing cards, talking about school, talking about who they liked, who they didn't like, and basic teenage talk. The three boys, Jack, George, and Rick have always kept themselves busy either with sports, playing tag, or just hanging out, but today wasn't one of those days.

"Hey guys, I'm bored. All we've done today is sit around talking about school on a SATURDAY!" said George.

"Me too," commented Jack.

"Ok, smarty pants. Since you're the ones who are bored, you come up with an idea," Rick protested.

So all of them began to think, and think, and think. George decided to break the silence.

"Hey! You know that large place about a mile from here?" said George.

"Oh, that place that looks like there are buried people there?"

That place gives me the chills just thinking about it," said Jack.

"Isn't that the place about 5 to 6 acres big?"

"So what about it?" said Rick.

"Well, I've always wanted to see what was down there," said George.

"You're nuts!" interrupted Jack, "The ghosts will get you."

"There are no ghosts down there, you chicken. I say we go check it out. They're doing some digging in there and I wanna see what they found," George replied.

Jack didn't seem too fond of the idea. The expression on his face said it all. His eyes opened wide, and he swallowed hard. Nevertheless, it was weird that he hadn't fainted yet. See Jack saw too many of those "Jason" movies and read too many books about ghosts and goblins. He actually started believing them. He believed that the books were a sign to us of what was going to happen.

"Come on guys. We ain't gonna get any older, let's go!"

You could surely tell George was excited.

"Come on Jack, calm down. I'll even hold your hand if you want," Rick said mockingly.

Rick and George always got a kick from laughing at Jack.

Soon they began their journey to the burial ground, not realizing what they would find. When they reached the burial ground they noticed the NO TRESPASSING sign, but passed right by it. As they entered, their mouths opened in astonishment. Within the burial ground they found holes in the ground about 16-28 feet deep.

"Hey Jack, look at the ghosts!" said George.

He pushed Jack to make him tumble over a coffin pulled out from the ground.

"Ahhh, don't do that!" said Jack as he examined the coffin.

"Yo guys, what is that over there?" said Jack.

To their surprise, they found a coffin with a heart-shaped symbol on it.

"Rick, take out paper from my back pack and trace that," said George.

"Why, you wanna give the drawing to your girlfriend?" said Jack.

Jack began to ridicule George to get back at him for pushing him earlier.

"No, but I remember that my uncle took a class on African art and he might be able to help us," said George.

"Who said this was African?" replied Jack.

"Well it won't hurt to ask, Mr. Know It All."

Astounded by what they found, they were motivated to continue to look around. Jack's fear seemed to fade away as the hours passed by. As they continued, they began to collect numerous amounts of buttons, rings, coins, glass beads, and shells. They also collected shroud pins and coffin nails. In the process of collecting some beads from a coffin, Rick accidentally opened a coffin. When he opened it, he began to gag.

"What's wrong Rick?" asked Jack.

As the three gathered around the coffin, they saw two sets of body bones.

"Ahhh, what's that?" Jack exclaimed.

"That's what you're going to look like in a few years," said George.

"No, for real, why were there two people buried in one coffin?" asked Jack.

"I don't know, I'll take a picture," said Rick.

"Don't tell me you brought a camera to the burial ground," said George.

"Yeah, you think I was going to miss the expression on Jack's face and how he looked when he fainted?" explained Rick.

"Very funny, ha ha," said Jack.

"Just take the picture so we can get out of here."

"Wait, there's still more to see, then we'll go to my uncle's house so he can explain what all this stuff is."

While George and Rick began to walk, they didn't hear the steps of Jack. When they turned around, they realized Jack was lagging behind, looking upset. George and Rick got the camera ready to take his picture when he suddenly fainted. When they got to him, George asked him what was wrong. Jack explained that he wondered why the city decided to unbury these people. How was this supposed to change history? What's done is done was his motto. He began to get upset to think about why so many children and older people died.

"Well Jack, let's go to my uncle's house and find out, I think we've been here long enough," said George.

They all went to George's uncle's house to see what he could tell them.

"Hey Uncle Bob, how are you?" asked George.

"Well Uncle, you see we were bored, and well, we decided to go to the burial ground and see what we could find. We found some stuff and we want you to explain it."

"Oh, the New York African Burial Ground. Wow, brings back memories. Why don't you kids sit down,

I'll bring you soda, and I'll tell you," said Uncle Bob.

When Uncle Bob left, Jack told George that he knew it was an African place, how he read it in a book. Uncle Bob returned and asked,

"So guys, how can I help you?"

As Rick took out the drawing, he said, "Well, George says you might know about this heart we found on one of the coffins."

"Yes boys, this is an Adinkra symbol, 'Sankofa' used in Ghana."

"What does it mean?" interrupted Jack.

"Well, this symbol means learning from the past in order to build the future."

The telephone rang and Uncle Bob went to get it. The boys began to meditate on what he had said. Jack realized the answers to his questions on why the burial ground was being rediscovered. In order for their generation to learn about how Africans lived in the past they needed something to study, which would be the burial ground. Uncle Bob returned.

"Hey Uncle Bob, we also have these pictures we took of things. What do these things mean? Some of these bodies are tiny."

"Well boys 40% of all burials were children whose ages ranged from infancy to twelve years of age. This picture you have here is probably of a woman and her child who died as a result of childbirth or illness."

"That's really sad," all three said.

"Well, we also found pins and buttons and other things. What can you say about this Uncle?" asked George.

"Let me see, I have some archaeological background. These shroud pins and cotton linen lead me to

determine that some adults and children were wrapped in shrouds or winding sheets when buried."

"Does anybody come to visit these people?" said Rick.

"Yes. There is even a group that does a special ritual. A ritual is like celebrating Christmas and opening gifts. A long time ago," said Uncle Bob, "Europeans wanted to enslave African people, so they hired and paid people, including some Africans, to kidnap them. Most of those enslaved Africans never saw their families again."

Uncle Bob began to explain how as time passed, many people died from diseases and illnesses because the doctors didn't have the medication. Uncle Bob also stated that many Africans used to modify their teeth as a ritual.

"You boys should also realize how we don't have to worry about losing loved ones to enslavement. Even though we still lose many children in childbirth which also occurred in the past, it's not as many as back then."

"Well guys, I'm hungry and you must go and eat dinner as well."

"Ok Uncle Bob, thanks for every thing you've taught us. You explained a whole lot about what individuals are interred in the ground, the quality of life and how it was the same and different from now. I think we should study on Saturday rather than play ball."

They all looked at each other and all replied "Naa, that's OK. Bye, Uncle Bob, and thanks again." As they walked, they meditated in silence upon the things they learned.





# 1999 African Burial Ground Writing Competition Winners:

## Middle School Poetry Category

### First Place Winner Middle School Category

#### HA! HA! I'M FREE NOW!

by Monifa S. Rayson  
Roberto Clemente Public School 13  
District 19, 6th grade

Freedom is here.  
No more chains, whips,  
or white folks calling us Negroes  
when we are Africans.

Freedom is here at last.  
No more white folks beating on us.  
No more starving to death because  
our ancestors always fought  
for our rights!

Freedom is here,  
where we can run around  
and drink from any  
water fountain we please.  
We can sit in any bus seat  
without white folks bossing us around.

Freedom is here.  
I'm free, you can't break me.  
You can't whip me.  
Ha! Ha! I'm FREE to run around the park  
and BE ME. Free at last,  
Free at last to jump how high I want to.  
Ha! Ha! I'm free to go see my family.  
You can make me die,  
but can't make me cry.  
I'm free!



Jaymee Frole, Northeast School  
Photo credit: Emilyn L. Brown

### Second Place Winner, Middle School Category NEW YORK CITY'S AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

by Jaymee Frole, Northeast School, 4th grade

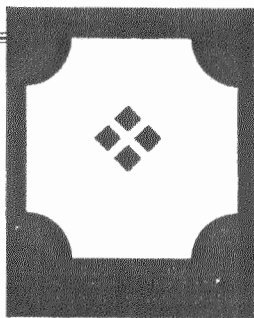
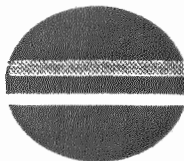
It was a long time ago, one day  
When two builders were on their way  
They started constructing  
A federal building  
When they noticed something far away.

They began to dig in the ground  
While digging, it was there they found  
In shapes and sizes  
To their surprises,  
Some bones from the African Burial Ground.

To the museum they brought the bones  
To find out more about the Africans' home,  
With little engraved  
Yet, coins and shells remained  
They carefully studied these tombs  
Some very sad facts were uncovered  
Bones from infants and children discovered  
Involved in slave trade.  
these Africans made  
A most difficult life with each other.

When the research comes to an end  
All the bones to New York they will send  
With questions and pains  
Still these remains  
Will be buried all over again.

On this special ceremonial day  
All the people of the city will say  
With hardships discovered  
and struggles uncovered  
We shall honor the African people this way.



**Third Place Winner  
Middle School Category**

**REST IN PEACE**

by Michael Budd  
Northeast School, 4th grade

The bones just lying there  
No one caring or even knowing  
they were there.

One day uncovered, a mystery to be solved,  
The human remains of poor slaves.

They had not been able to rest  
in peace or dignity.  
Until they were treated with the right courtesy.

And taken to a proper resting place,  
Neglected slaves no longer!



**Fourth Place Winner  
Middle School Category**

**THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND REVISITED**

by Wallangely Ovengo  
P.S. 75X, 5th grade

Africans have to work  
Or they will be beaten down  
Africans enslaved  
Africans in those graves  
Africans on the Burial Ground  
Africans need to go North  
North to Freedomland  
Slaves, restless slaves  
Tired of slavery's band

Africans enslaved  
Africans in those graves  
Africans on the Burial Ground  
Uprooted after they were buried  
Africans in the Burial Ground  
Our ancestors never found freedom  
They were buried  
In a Negroes' Burial Ground.

**Fifth Place Category  
Middle School Category**

**THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND: REBELLION**

by Kimiko Greenidge  
P.S. 75X, 5th grade

Voice 1  
Voice 2

We have to get out of here  
We have to work all day

We must  
Master will be here soon  
Our skin has gone pale  
We must stay alive

We slave in the North

We must respect Master  
Master does not respect us  
We need to be free

We can't be slaves  
We don't get respect

Voice 3

The world doesn't respect Africans

Voice 4  
Voice 5

Master has everything  
We have rags  
We can't stay like this  
All the days of our lives  
We're mad

Voice 6

Master has killed our families

Voice 7  
Voice 8

We're next!  
We want freedom!



**Congratulations  
to all  
our Winners!**

## GENERAL SERVICES ADMINISTRATION EXPEDITES PLANS FOR AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND INTERPRETIVE CENTER AND MEMORIAL

Dear Community,

We are pleased to share with you an update of the African Burial Ground project and, in particular, the status of the memorialization plan. In recent months, General Services Administration (GSA) has made significant progress in this endeavor, with the outstanding leadership of our expert consultants. In addition to changes in GSA leadership and policy that better advances the project, we are also working diligently, in full support of our consultants, to overcome past project delays and difficulties, for which GSA accepts full responsibility and truly regrets.

You may be interested to know that, in response to broad descendant community concerns and in coordination with our project leadership, GSA is pleased to announce an accelerated and expedited project schedule for the design and installation of the African Burial Ground Interpretive Center and the Exterior Memorial. Both the Interpretive Center and the Exterior Memorial schedules are integral components of the overall memorialization timeline. The newly revised schedules for both of these will significantly improve the schedule for reinterment, now slated for as early as December 2000.

In addition to this scheduling improvement, Peggy King Jorde, Project Executive of the Office of Memorialization, will, as early as January 2000, begin to organize and coordinate the activities of a Reinterment Committee. Under Ms. King Jorde's leadership, this group will coordinate a variety of important community-based memorialization initiatives that will culminate in the final reinterment ceremony in 2000. Of note, "Homegoing," a coffin building project for the reinterment of over 400 human remains, is designed to engage the local, national, and international descendant community [See Peggy King Jorde's Memorialization Update on page 10]

Under the current plan, our aim is to uphold, with integrity, the original goals and objectives for an

appropriate memorialization set forth under the 1993 Federal Steering Committee recommendations to the U.S. Congress. The Federal Steering Committee report was thoughtfully crafted under the guidance of both expert and descendant community representatives, and coordinated with broad community input through public meetings over a period of nearly two years.

As mentioned above, a Reinterment Committee will be formed to prepare plans for an international reinterment ceremony. If you have interest in the Committee's activities or require further information on all related memorialization activities, you may contact Peggy King Jorde or her assistant in the Office of Memorialization at (212) 264-6949.

Sincerely

Ronald Law  
Assoc. Regional Admin.  
African Burial Ground  
Project

Bill Lawson, HAIA  
Deputy Regional  
Administrator  
Northeast &  
Caribbean Region

**GSA's next Public Forum will  
be held on  
Saturday, April 15, 2000  
@ 26 Federal Plaza, New York, NY  
Call (212) 264-2100 for further details**

**QUESTIONS OR COMMENTS  
ABOUT THE  
AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND?  
SEND E-MAIL TO:**

***nyabg@worldnet.att.net***



## MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF NEW YORK'S 18TH CENTURY AFRICANS

Sherrill D. Wilson, Ph.D.  
(Part 1 of 3)

Monday, November 6, 1752  
New-York Mercury

Runaway from Philip Livingston of New-York, on the 28th of October last, A Negro Man lately imported from Africa His Hair or Woll is curled in Locks, In a very remarkable Manner. He is a very lusty Fellow, and cannot speak a Word of English or Dutch, or any other language but that of his own Country. He was seen last Monday, on New York Island, and is suppose to be in the woods, near Harlem. Who-ever takes up with the said Fellow, and delivers him to the said Master, shall receive THREE POUNDS, as a reward from Philip Livingston.

July 30, 1789  
New York Packet

### TEN DOLLARS REWARD

Run away from the subscriber about the 6th of April last a Negro wench named Pegg, about 40 years of age; has a remarkable long chin, speaks Dutch and English; took with her several changes of clothes, is supposed to be gone to the Eastward, either on Long-Island or Connecticut. Whoever takes up and secures the said Negro Wench, so that the owner may have her again shall have the above reward and all reasonable charges paid by JOHN BANKS

New York newspapers were the prime source of "public information" during the 18th century. According to Noah Webster in 1793 "newspapers are the most easily sought after means of knowledge."

New York City newspapers depicting Africans included the following publications: New-York Mercury

June 8, 1793  
New-York Daily Advertiser

### To Be Sold

For a certain term, to be agreed on, until their freedom be earned;

A BLACK FAMILY, consisting of a man, his wife, a fine girl of about twelve, another girl about five years old, and a male child capable of running about alone, the parents are honest, sober, neat, quiet, well disposed; and have lived in the country; the man an excellent farmer, the woman a good cook, and excellent in a Dairy; the eldest girl very handy in attending at table, &c &c, the younger a child of hopes—in short it is a useful trustworthy comely family, and of late years accustomed to live in this city. Enquire of the printers. NB. The above will be sold either separate or altogether.

1752, New-York Gazette or Weekly Post Boy 1762, New-York Chronicle 1769, New-York Packet 1776, New York Packet and American Advertiser 1776, New York Packet 1777, 1778, 1779, 1786, 1789, New-York Journal and Patriotic Register 1791, New York Daily Advertiser 1792, New-York Journal and Patriotic Register 1792, New-York Daily Advertiser 1792, New-York Journal and Patriotic Register 1792, New York Daily Advertiser 1793.

Public depictions of the Africans enslaved and free who lived and died in New York City during the 18th century commonly portray human captives for sale and fugitives who may "pretend to be free."

A primary research goal of the African Burial Ground Project is to understand and document the everyday lives of Africans, enslaved and free in 18th cen-

tury New York City. First hand accounts of narratives are extremely rare, however classified advertisements appearing in city and rural newspapers are common, and numerous for this period. The above advertisements are examples of typical ads which often provide revealing clues about the occupational skills, possessions, dress, linguistic abilities, physical characteristics and personality traits of enslaved Africans, as accessed by the subscriber of the advertisement. The inherent bias of these ads is given. The alleged "master or owner" views both the runaway and the enslaved person "for sale" as his property to be sold or recaptured at his discretion. Runaway advertisements are aimed at recapturing the fugitive, typically they indicate the name of the person, presumed destination if known, physical traits, occupational skills, and description of the clothes worn when last seen. For sale ads never mention the names of the person (s) for sale, but instead emphasize occupational skills, honesty, sobriety and disposition.

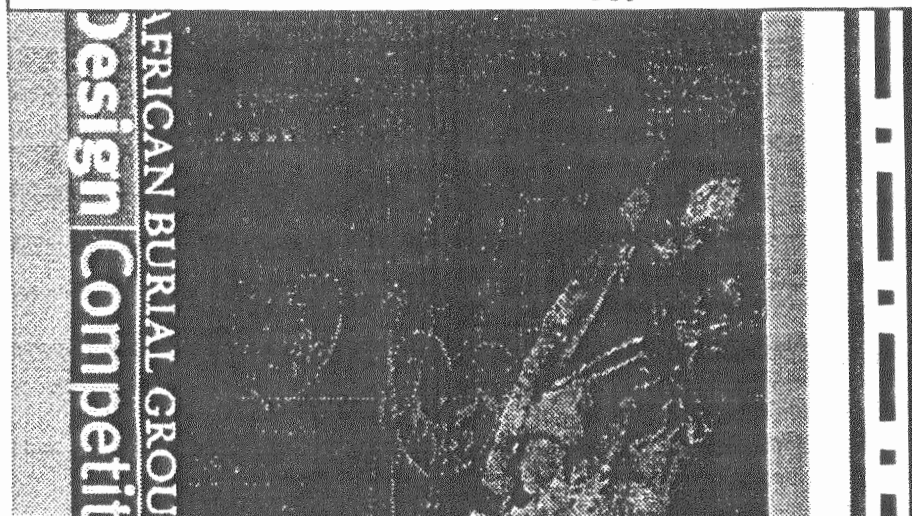
This three part article will examine and provide further examples of "images" depicting the lives of New York's African population. ♦♦♦



18th century African buttermilk seller, Courtesy of NYPL Anderson Scrapbooks Vol. 1:66

## Memorialization Update:

From the Desk of Peggy King Jorde



Brochure distributed by the Memorialization Office  
design by S&S Graphics, Inc. New York City

### Design for an Exterior Memorial Expedited.

Community sentiment has urged the General Services Administration (GSA) to expedite the previous procurement schedule for a 2002 installation to design and build the African Burial Ground Exterior Memorial. The Memorial design will be commissioned and installed at the exterior site of the African Burial Ground which is adjacent to the 290 Broadway Federal office building at Duane and Elk Streets.

Barring any unforeseen circumstances, a winning team is now expected to be named by September 2000. Not unlike the review process for the Interpretive Center design, opportunity for community review and commentary is scheduled with the competitors prior to final selection. A public exhibit of finalists' proposals is currently anticipated for July. Proposals will be exhibited over a period of a few weeks in the lobby of 290 Broadway where the community will be invited to provide written commentary on each proposal. More information will be provided at a later date.

### Memorial Site To Be Ready for Reinterment by December 2000.

Under the revised installation schedule for the Memorial design, the site will now be ready for reinterment before the previously stated year 2002. While the Committee on Reinterment may consider Spring 2001 to be a better time for facilitating a variety of anticipated outdoor memorial activities at reinterment, the site will be ready for reinterment by December 2000.

The Memorialization Office is now able to move forward with fulfilling the larger plan for the African Burial Ground commemoration. Until recently, efforts to convene the Committee on Reinterment and implement project initiatives have been delayed without benefit of the required funding resources and a revised project schedule being implemented. As of yet, the Office of Memorialization has not received the anticipated funding resources to staff, house, nor enable the office to adequately coordinate all of the work for Memorialization. However, we do anticipate convening the Committee on Reinterment by late No-

vember to begin the early planning stages of the ceremony. Consistent with the sentiments of the broader community and the 1993 Federal Steering Committee report, the reinterment of over 400 human remains will occur following the construction and installation of the Memorial design (also the site of reinterment) so as to avoid any undue disturbance of the ancestral remains after reinterment.

**Interpretive Center Award Eminent.** The winning team commissioned for the design of the Interpretive Center will be announced before the end of the current calendar year 1999. Installation and formal opening of the Interpretive Center (to be housed in the lobby of the 290 Broadway building), will be coordinated with the final reinterment ceremony.

### Homegoing Initiative – The National Community

**Participates.** A significant objective for the Federal Steering Committee and community-at-large was to make certain that the memorialization of the National Historic Landmark, African Burial Ground attains global significance. The Homegoing Initiative aims to do just that.

The Office of Memorialization will seek and encourage public/private partnerships to help realize the memorialization of this important site. One such effort is the "Homegoing Initiative" which promises to engage the national descendant community in the most meaningful way through the design and crafting of burial vessels for over 400 ancestral remains. While we will look to identify crafters from the continent of Africa, we are actively courting organizations like the National Conference of Black

*(Continued on page 11)*



## African Burial Ground Update



The Ancestral Day of Awareness. On the far left is Orisha Soares, Ruth Harden, and Laura Limuli. At the podium is Morenike Olabunmi. On the far right is Deborah Singletary, M. Roz Olatunji, Ife Mitchell, and Rosemary West. Photo credit: August Temple III

□ **Ancestral Day of Awareness.** On Saturday, September 18, 1999, OPEI volunteer Morenike Olabunmi hosted an Ancestral Day of Awareness at the African Burial Ground site. The day-long homage to the ancestors included chants by members of the Garifuna Nation, prayers by Brother Leroy Applin of House of the Lord Church, and Reverend Calvin Butts of Abyssinnia Baptist Church. Ritual prayers were offered by Chief Firebird Graywolf. Several strong performances rounded out the day's tribute including a moving salute from Women of the Calabash and poetic offerings by OPEI volunteer Wajeedah Anderson-Beyah.

□ **Descendants of Africans.** At a recent GSA public forum, Descendants of Africans presented their demands for a December 26, 1999 reinterment of the 427 remains excavated from the African Burial Ground between 1991-1992. Meetings between the Descendants and GSA are continuing.

□ **Stamp Petition Drive Extended.** The African Burial Ground Commemorative Stamp Petition Drive has been extended to November 25, 1999. Petitions may be obtained online at [abgppetition.freesevers.com](http://abgppetition.freesevers.com) or by calling OPEI at (212) 432-5707.

□ **OPEI's Archival Reading Room** has primary documents and secondary articles relating to New York history. Also available are a wide range of anthropological and archaeological articles. Please call Ms. Tamara Jubilee-Shaw at (212) 432-5707 for an appointment.

**OPEI VOLUNTEERS  
OF THE YEAR  
1999-2000  
WAJEEDAH ANDERSON BEYAH  
&  
LAURA LIMULI**

### *Memorialization Update (Continued)*

Mayors as an ideal resource for helping us to identify and engage the most diverse and unique descendant communities within the nation to participate in this effort. If you, your guild, club, or organization/corporation are interested in a "Partnership with the African Burial Ground Memorialization" efforts, we invite you to contact us at the Office of Memorialization: (212) 264-6949. Please forward e-mail to [peggy.king-jorde@gsa.gov](mailto:peggy.king-jorde@gsa.gov).

Many thanks to you who have expressed an interest in "partnering" on memorialization efforts already. Please allow us an opportunity to perform some preliminary coordination before we reach out to you personally. In our aim to help appropriately memorialize this vitally important site, your active support, constructive criticism, and valuable suggestions continue to be our source of inspiration, as is your expressed appreciation for this office's efforts to synthesize the unique viewpoints of our multi-faceted community.



### **OPEI Mini-Calendar of Saturday Events\***

Saturday, Dec. 18, 1999  
Kwanzaa Film Festival  
12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, Jan. 8, 2000  
Volunteer Training  
12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, Feb. 12, 2000  
African Burial Ground  
Film Festival  
12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Saturday, Mar. 25, 2000  
Youth Symposium  
12:00 - 5:00 p.m.

\*Reservations are needed for all events. Events are subject to change or cancellation. Please call to confirm time and locations @ (212) 432-5707.



## THE MIDDLE PASSAGE REVISITED

### A Report from the Homeward Bound Foundation

On July 3, 1999 a Middle Passage Monument was lowered onto the floor of the Atlantic Ocean, 427 kilometers off New York's harbor, facing Africa. Wayne James, the founder of the Homeward Bound Foundation (HBF) which sponsored the project, chose the ocean site as a tribute to the 427 men, women and children excavated from the African Burial Ground between 1991 - 92. "The purpose of the ocean monument is to serve as a gravestone for the world's largest graveyard, the Atlantic Ocean's infamous Middle Passage. Millions of African people died during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade between the 15th and 19th centuries, their bones forming a trail from Africa to the Americas."

The tribute began with an elaborate, all-day Middle Passage Monument Ceremony at Harlem's Riverbank State Park on Saturday, July 3, 1999. Following the ceremony, which featured a collection of funeral rituals from around the world, the Middle Passage Monument was placed on board the *Young America*, a replica of an 18th century slaving vessel. Accompanying the monument were eleven men and women of African descent, several casually hand-picked by Wayne James as late as July 3rd. "We wanted the experience to be equally available to all of us, so I deliberately kept the decision process as structure-free as possible. There was no preferential treatment when our ancestors were randomly chosen to be enslaved."

Documenting the entire event was film maker Denise Harris, a volunteer for the African Burial Ground Project. "My role on the journey was to document the proceedings for a film that I am currently editing



The Middle  
Passage  
Monument

Photo  
credit:  
Denise  
Harris

for the Homeward Bound Foundation. The film will be used for fund-raising," she explained.

After two days at sea, during which prayers, vigils, and rituals were performed, the *Young America* arrived at the monument site. A final ritual involving libations, the casting of soil and herbs and spices from the continent of Africa into the ocean, and the placing of a container bearing the names of thousands of descendants of enslaved Africans culminated with the lowering of the monument into the ocean. The monument quickly disappeared from sight, sinking to a depth of over 9,000 feet.

"I felt as if a weight had been lifted off my back," said Wayne James when asked how he felt about the completion of his mission. "We have finally taken care of our unfinished business—the long-overdue placing of a gravestone on the grave site of our ancestors. Now we can begin the real work—healing our psyches as Black people and encouraging the whole world to heal from the racism which continues to retard human progress and racial harmony. For 400 years our ancestors were deprived of making their rightful contributions to humanity. It is our contributions

in the coming century that will be our greatest monument to our ancestors," James added.

Blues singer Mary Moore of Kansas City, Missouri crouched her 6'2" frame into a little ball and sobbed after the monument disappeared beneath the surface, while 26-year old Drayton Muhammad, representing the Nation of Islam, hugged everyone and gave out his share of high-fives. Former Black Panther member Rosemary West, an unassuming, soft-spoken lady in her early fifties, simply said, "the ancestors are proud of us today," then stared into the depths of the Atlantic.

Almost immediately after, however, the tide began to turn. One by one, the mechanical devices on board the ship began to malfunction or simply not function. And by nightfall on Wednesday, July 7th, the ship had drifted back to the vicinity of the monument site, its engine expended, rudder broken, and its crew manually removing water from the engine room. Another mechanical mishap resulted in over one-half of the ship's freshwater supply being wasted. And because the water desalinization mechanism also failed, showering and toilet use

were first restricted and shortly thereafter terminated. The ship's radio and telephone services were damaged, and the private mobile phones on board were of insufficient range to communicate with the mainland. An ominous rainstorm, uncannily, remained close enough to keep almost all of the 18 people on board awake on the night of July 7th. Each day, for the next three consecutive days, the Young America would make progress by day but be mysteriously blown back to the vicinity of the monument site by the following morning. Several persons on board reported hearing voices and inexplicable sounds. Captain Scott Chew stated on record that he heard voices on several occasions while at the helm but saw no one.

Doralee Zeneberg, the ship's cook, reported on record that she was awakened by mysterious conversations in the hallway. That same evening, on three occasions, she was visited by a tall, slender, Black lady in a turban. Mary Moore reported seeing the faces of children, and several people heard the voices of children on board the ship as well as in the waters in the vicinity of the vessel. "My initial involvement with the project was purely for financial gain," said Captain Chew. "After what I experienced on board this ship over the past several days, I know that there was a bigger purpose for my being here. I will forever be changed by this experience," Chew added.

Justin Stockdale, a 21-year old college senior at Washington and Lee University in Virginia, said that he was glad that the people on board had gotten together to discuss the strange occurrences on board. "It's good to know that I wasn't the only person hearing things," he said. "The ancestors have waited for us to do this for 500 years," said Rosemary West. "I guess they were so happy that we had finally come to pay our respects to them that they didn't want us to leave right away."

After several days of trying to sail back to New York City's harbor, Captain Chew radioed the Atlantic City, New Jersey division of the U.S. Coast Guard to rescue him and 17 other adults from the relentless grip of the Atlantic Ocean. The Coast Guard responded immediately, dispatching a helicopter to evacuate one woman, Shindana Cooper, a diabetic experiencing health-related complications. A cutter arrived at the site of the distressed vessel (approximately 180 miles off New Jersey) 20 hours later in order to tow the ship to the Coast Guard Station in Atlantic City.

"The inconveniences on board the ship gave us a minute sampling of what our ancestors were forced to endure as they crossed the Middle Passage. Millions survived. Millions did not," said Zakiyyah Taalib Bey, a Bermuda-born mother of three. Zakiyyah convinced her mother to babysit her children so that she could be a part of the historic journey. "I would do it all over again," she concluded. Denise Harris offered this perspective, "The pilgrimage to place the Middle Passage Monument has made it clear to me that we as Africans in America must honor and be aware of the power of our ancestors. We must realize that we can tap that strength in our daily lives. What I heard and saw out in the ocean was our ancestors. They surrounded us and kept us there. I call upon all people in our communities to offer more prayers and rituals to our ancestors. Attention must be paid to our African Maafa. Our journey's tribute was just a beginning."

Designed by a team of seven metal artists on St. Croix in the U.S. Virgin Islands, the 17 x 12 foot Monument placed onto the ocean floor features a three-part arch depicting the converging of the past, present and future. Made of brushed aluminum, the monument implies a spiritual and physical return to the continent of Africa. Six replicas of the monument will be placed on land between the years 2000 and 2006

in six regions of the world where the transatlantic slave trade occurred: Africa, the Caribbean, Central America, Europe, North America and South America.

The land-based monuments will be 50 feet tall and feature a 100-foot, granite walkway. Each foot will represent an estimated million African people who perished during the transatlantic slave trade. The monuments will be inscribed with the ancient and modern history of Africa and the African Diaspora, along with hieroglyphics, symbols, significant dates, events, names, and places. The first land monument will be erected in the United States on July 3, 2000. Several eastern seaboard cities from Newport, Rhode Island to Savannah, Georgia are being considered. The Congressional Black Caucus, led by Congresswomen Donna Christian-Christiansen and Cynthia McKinney, are in the process of securing federal lands as potential monument sites.

"Our goal is to create a symbolic monument which serves as a physical, cultural, and spiritual pilgrimage back to Africa," James explained. "The on-land monuments will encourage discourse, education, understanding, and healing from the atrocities of the slave trade. With the renewed spirit and focus that will come from honoring our ancestors, we can use the 21st century to contribute to the world on their behalf."



Visit HBF's website at [www.middle-passage.org](http://www.middle-passage.org) to learn about their exciting future goals, to obtain a film of the event, or to purchase the Middle Passage CD. Telephone No. (888) 334-9229 or (202) 333-0911.



**Sankofa**

**"go back and fetch it"**



## IN SEARCH OF THE PAST:

A significant research project on the history of the 24th Infantry Buffalo Soldiers "East of the Mississippi" at Madison Barracks was recently initiated in upstate New York at Sackets Harbor.



Barbara Whited Muniz,  
Project Director and  
president of the Black  
American Roots Society

The Black American Roots Society, collaboratively working with the village of Sackets Harbor, New York, wishes to announce the beginning of a new and exciting chapter to the story of the famous black regiment: "The Buffalo Soldiers 24th Infantry and their first post "East of the Mississippi," in the State of New York.

During the years of 1908 thru 1911, this regiment of black soldiers, fresh from the Philippine War, was sent north. The regiment of soldiers (650 strong) traveled by train, many of them with their new brides and infant children from the Philippines. The wives of the other officers followed later, traveling from out West to join up with their husbands. What was the impact made on the villagers by the soldiers? What racial and cultural challenges faced these soldiers and their families at Madison Barracks? What community organizations did the wives of these soldiers create while in New York? These are just some of the questions this re-search will provide.

In the numerous accounts of the 24th Infantry Buffalo Soldiers' Story, there is little or no mention of

this infantry being stationed in New York. We plan to fill in this gap in the history of the 24th Regiment Buffalo Soldiers and their peacetime stay in New York.

This project will develop a curriculum for students from a grant provided by the New York State Education Department. Also the Black American Roots Society will be raising funds to produce an exhibit and an educational documentary. Students from Brooklyn, New York will be traveling upstate to work with students, teachers, historians, and researchers, to give hands-on experience in this project. This project has been partially funded by the New York State Educational Department. We need to match this small grant to bring to all of New York a permanent exhibit on the 24th Infantry Buffalo Soldiers East of the Mississippi."

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### Project Participants:

Project Director:  
Barbara Whited Muniz

Historian/Researcher:  
Khadijah Matin

Historian: Robert Brennen

Former Mayor and  
Village Historian/  
Researcher:  
Norm Hunneyman

Urban Cultural Park  
Coordinator: David W. Altieri  
Village Historian/Researcher:  
Jean Derouin

Education Liaison:  
Jeanne Hammock

Exhibit Manager:  
Franklin Darwin

Arts/Graphics:  
Jeffrey Stackhouse

Photographer:  
Mensah Wali

Documentary Personnel:  
Melvin Mcray

Participating Students  
from Brooklyn, N.Y.:  
Maureen Lewis  
Gwendolyn Bartlett



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Please submit your name and/or  
corrections to:

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Tel. (212) 432-5707  
Fax (212) 432-5920

# OPEI'S FALL 1999 READING LIST

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and Tamara R. Jubilee

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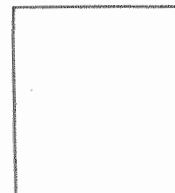
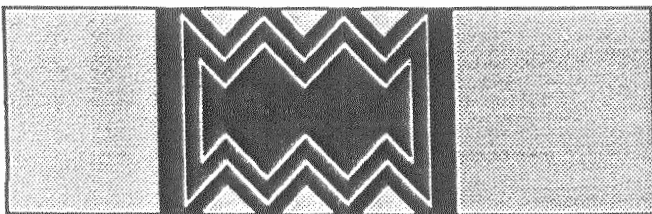
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## IN THE NEXT ISSUE OF UPDATE:

- ▼ Update on African Burial  
Ground Artifacts.



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